

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Transcontinental Railroad



Congress had often discussed the construction of a railroad to the Pacific in the 1850s, but arguments between the North and South over where the railroad would be placed prevented any action from being taken. During the Civil War, the Southern states had seceded from the Union, so Northern legislators in Congress moved quickly on plans for transcontinental railroads.

In 1862, Congress chose two companies to build the first railroad to the Pacific. The Central Pacific (CP) was to build east from Sacramento, California. The Union Pacific (UP) was to start in Omaha, Nebraska, and build west. Congress gave loans of \$16,000 a mile to build across level land, \$32,000 in foothills, and \$48,000 in mountains. In addition, the railroads were given land grants of 20 square miles for each mile of track laid.

The Central Pacific began construction first, and it faced the great challenge of getting across the Sierra Nevada mountains. Chinese laborers were brought in to work on the CP crews. In 1865, the Union Pacific began building west. Many of the UP crew members were Irish immigrants. At the end of the Civil War, thousands of veterans were hired by the railroad crews.

The crews worked swiftly. Surveyors, road bed crews, and bridge builders worked ahead of the track crews. Then track was laid at the rate of four rails per minute when things were going well.

On May 10, 1869, the Central Pacific was joined to the Union Pacific by the driving of the golden spike at Promontory Point, Utah. Passengers and goods could now travel from the Atlantic to the Pacific. People no longer had to rely on wagon trains to move into the West, and those with crops, livestock, and other products could use the railroad to ship to markets in the East.

A second transcontinental railroad was built when the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railroad expanded eastward to St. Louis and westward to meet the Southern Pacific Railroad at Needles, California. In 1883, the Southern Pacific built eastward to Galveston, Texas, creating the third transcontinental line. Also in 1883, construction was completed on the Northern Pacific Railroad from Lake Superior to Portland, Oregon.

Matching

Match the statement on the right with the correct term on the left.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Central Pacific | A. Approved the construction of a transcontinental railroad |
| _____ 2. Chinese | B. Ethnic group that worked for the Union Pacific |
| _____ 3. Congress | C. Ethnic group that worked for the Central Pacific |
| _____ 4. Irish | D. Place where the Central Pacific and Union Pacific met |
| _____ 5. Northern Pacific | E. Group of workers hired after the Civil War |
| _____ 6. Promontory Point | F. Railroad built from Lake Superior to Portland, Oregon |
| _____ 7. Union Pacific | G. Railroad built from Omaha to the west |
| _____ 8. Veterans | H. Railroad built from Sacramento to the east |

Do ²⁵ Both Sides!

Homesteading

Do Both Sides!

During the Civil War, Congress passed the Homestead Act. It gave citizens or immigrants 160 acres of land on the Great Plains if they settled there for five years. The aim was to create many small farms from Wisconsin westward. At the same time, new railroads tried to encourage settlement in order to get more business. They sold land they had bought or that had been granted to them by the government when their lines were built.

People came from the eastern United States and from many other countries to homestead. They found treeless prairie covered with tough-rooted grass. A steel plow could cut through the roots, but often there was not enough water. Homesteaders learned "dry farming," in which grains are planted deep to catch moisture low in the soil. Homesteaders learned other ways to get along on the plains. Without enough wood, they built houses called "soddies" from blocks of root-filled earth. Their fires burned with dry buffalo droppings called chips. To pump up drinking water, they built windmills to catch the prairie wind. They learned the importance of planting trees to hold the soil once the prairie grass was plowed.

The new farmers faced many problems—blizzards, fires, drought, and sometimes grasshoppers that ate everything from crops to boots! Even at home in their sod houses, people were irritated by snakes and insects falling from the ceiling. Yet homesteading still drew people. In 1893, a last bit of land was opened for homesteading—the Cherokee Outlet in Oklahoma. Over 100,000 people lined the Kansas border to rush in when the signal was given.

Part B. Listed below are technological breakthroughs and government policies that aided the settlement of the West. For each, write how the item helped the settler and note what geographic disadvantages the item helped the settler overcome.

1. Sod house:

8. Transcontinental railroad:

2. Barbed wire:

9. Government Indian policy:

3. Windmills:

10. The elimination of the buffalo:

4. Irrigation:

5. Screen windows:

6. Buffalo chips:

7. Homestead Act: